

**Security Council**

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**Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa
and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for
Central Africa****I. Introduction**

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 11 June 2015 (S/PRST/2015/12), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in Central Africa since my previous report, dated 28 November 2017 (S/2017/995), and an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA. The report also provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region, pursuant to Council resolution 2349 (2017).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion**A. Political, peace and security developments and trends**

2. Central Africa continued to face serious political and security challenges against the backdrop of a regional economic slowdown. There have been some positive developments towards subregional integration, and efforts to consolidate democratic governance.

Political developments and trends

3. On 29 January, the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) held a consultative meeting in Addis Ababa, on the margins of the African Union summit. They agreed to convene a session of the Assembly of Heads of State of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa in February, which was subsequently postponed to a later date yet to be announced. They also decided to hold the seventeenth ordinary session of the Summit of ECCAS Heads of State and Government tentatively in June.

4. The fifth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa took place in Libreville on 3 and 4 March. It was preceded by the nineteenth ordinary session of the Defence and Security Commission of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa from 28 February to 1 March. In its final communiqué, the Council of Ministers, inter alia, strongly condemned the secessionist aspirations in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon and expressed



its "full support to the Cameroonian authorities"; rejected all external interference in electoral processes in the region and requested the ECCAS secretariat to reinforce support to concerned member States, in collaboration with the African Union; adopted the strategy to prevent and fight terrorism in Central Africa, developed within the framework of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa; instructed the ECCAS secretariat to develop a subregional strategy to fight mercenary activities and transnational organized crime in Central Africa; and decided to convene a regional conference towards the adoption of subregional regulation on pastoralism in Central Africa. The Council of Ministers also decided to launch an institutional, structural and functional reform of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa.

5. On 20 April, a consultative meeting was held between ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Lomé, where it was announced that the two subregional organizations would hold a joint summit on peace, security, radicalization and violent extremism in July 2018.

6. In Angola, President João Lourenço established an Inter-Ministerial Commission on State Reform on 15 February. He also pledged to hold local elections before the 2022 general elections.

7. In Cameroon, the north-west and south-west regions continued to face serious security challenges. Increased attacks against defence and security forces and abductions by suspected separatist armed groups, as well as the Government's heavy military response, resulted in fatalities and injuries. The situation deteriorated following the arrest in Nigeria of 47 alleged separatists, including the self-proclaimed president of the so-called "Ambazonia State", and their subsequent extradition to Cameroon on 26 January. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), those individuals had submitted asylum claims and four had been formally recognized as refugees. They will be tried in a military court under Law no. 2014/028 of 23 December 2014 on counter-terrorism. On 2 March, the Government announced a Cabinet reshuffle and, inter alia, appointed a new Minister of Territorial Administration. The new Minister, who hails from the north-west region, visited the two English-speaking regions and called for a peaceful resolution of the crisis through dialogue. A new Ministry for Decentralization and Rural Development was created.

8. Senatorial elections were held in Cameroon on 25 March, giving a large victory to the ruling party. In addition, preparations continue for presidential, legislative and municipal elections scheduled for 2018.

9. In Chad, social tensions persisted, exacerbated by the decision of the Government to cut the emoluments of civil servants and prompting a general strike by trade unions against austerity measures. The Government and labour unions reached an agreement on 14 March.

10. On 24 December, President Idriss Deby Itno announced a Government reshuffle, reducing the number of ministers from 37 to 24. On 6 April, he announced that legislative elections would be held in November 2018. From 19 to 27 March, the President convened a national forum on institutional reforms in N'Djamena. Most major opposition parties boycotted the forum. The forum recommended, inter alia, an extension of the term of the President and parliamentarians by one year, to six and five years, respectively, both renewable once; the abolishment of the post of Prime Minister; the adoption of a quota granting women 30 per cent of elected offices; and transformation of the electoral management body into a permanent structure. Most recommendations were included in the draft of the new Constitution, which was adopted by the National Assembly on 30 April, in a session boycotted by opposition deputies. On 3 May, the Prime Minister and his Government resigned.

11. In the Republic of the Congo, the Government and a representative of former rebel leader Frédéric Bintsamou, also known as Pastor Ntumi, signed a ceasefire agreement on 23 December. The agreement calls for the launch of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and for the return of internally displaced persons and the restoration of State authority. An ad hoc joint commission, comprising representatives from both sides, was formed to oversee the implementation of the agreement. On 22 January, the joint commission recommended the lifting of the arrest warrant against Pastor Ntumi, the creation of local demobilization centres, the restoration of administrative and judicial authorities, the withdrawal of Government forces, the restoration of State security in the crisis zones and the identification of former combatants. On 7 March, the commission announced the release from detention of five close allies of Pastor Ntumi. At the end of March, the Government shared a roadmap with the United Nations, outlining the steps envisaged for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

12. In Equatorial Guinea, legislative and municipal elections took place in November 2017, with the coalition led by the ruling Partido democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial obtaining all 75 seats in the Senate, all municipal seats, and 99 out of 100 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The opposition Ciudadanos por la Innovación de Guinea Ecuatorial party obtained the remaining seat. Women obtained 20 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 11 in the Senate. The opposition contested the results, denouncing fraud and irregularities. In early February, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo appointed a Cabinet of 25 members, down from 29, as part of austerity measures. On 26 February, the district court of Mongomo ordered the dissolution of the Ciudadanos por la Innovación party, because of its "threats against State security". On 7 May, the Supreme Court confirmed the dissolution of the party.

13. On 28 December, local media reported that an attempt to overthrow President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo was foiled. According to the Government, mercenaries allegedly involved in the attempt to destabilize the country originated from the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, leading to tensions with these countries. Against this background, several high-level visits took place to restore trust. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chad and President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic visited Malabo on 4 and 9 January, respectively, to express solidarity. They denied involvement and offered full cooperation in the investigation. On 25 January, following a meeting in N'Djamena between the Minister of State for Regional Integration of Equatorial Guinea and President Deby Itno, a communiqué was issued stating that Chad had no interest in destabilizing Equatorial Guinea and was working to preserve peace.

14. In Gabon, legislative elections were twice postponed, first to July 2017 and then to the end of April 2018. Except for former presidential candidate and opposition leader Jean Ping, who continued to reject any dialogue with the Government, the main opposition leaders expressed readiness to participate in the polls. On 30 April, the Constitutional Court dissolved the National Assembly and called for the Government to step down for failing to organize legislative elections within the constitutionally mandated timelines. The prerogatives of the National Assembly were temporarily transferred to the Senate. The Court further called on President Ali Bongo Ondimba to appoint a new Government, which would be accountable to the President and would resign as soon as elections took place. On 1 May, the Prime Minister and the Government resigned. The Prime Minister was reconfirmed in his functions by presidential decree on 3 May. A 41-member Government, the third since the conclusion of the national dialogue in May 2017, was sworn in on 7 May.

15. From 13 February to 6 March, President Bongo Ondimba, in his capacity as Chair of ECCAS, visited Angola, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe to discuss regional integration and security.

16. In Sao Tome and Principe, President Evaristo Carvalho promulgated a law creating a Constitutional Court on 27 December. On 3 January, the Supreme Court ruled that some provisions of the bill were unconstitutional. On 9 January, a demonstration was organized by opposition parties in Sao Tome to protest the nomination process for the Court's judges. On 15 January, the National Assembly, dominated by the ruling party, elected the five judges of the Constitutional Court amidst protests by opposition parties and pro-Government demonstrations by the ruling Acção Democrática Independente party, leading to the deployment of the police to control the situation. On 30 January, the judges of the Constitutional Court unanimously elected the Court's president. On 23 February, the National Assembly appointed the members of the National Electoral Commission to prepare for legislative, local and regional elections, scheduled for 2018.

17. The Government of Burundi followed through with its decision to revise the 2005 Constitution. Among other things, the revisions included: extending the presidential term to seven years; providing a five-year period for a possible review of the ethnic quota in all branches of Government; creating the post of Prime Minister and removing the post of Second Vice-President; and requiring a simple majority to pass basic bills in Parliament instead of a two-thirds majority. Many Burundian stakeholders and partners raised concerns that the proposed revisions could reverse the gains by the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. International partners sought to persuade the Government to conclude the inter-Burundian dialogue, led by the East African Community, before the referendum, but to no avail. On 17 May, Burundians went to the polls to approve the amendments to the Constitution, with the participation of one segment of the opposition. Voting reportedly took place in a relatively calm environment.

Security developments and trends

Central African Republic

18. In the Central African Republic, incidents of violence in different parts of the country reflected a fragile security situation. Continued activity by armed groups and criminal networks led to tensions in several regions. In April, a series of clashes occurred in Bangui following a joint operation launched by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and national security forces to forcefully disarm criminal groups controlling neighbourhoods in the capital. The inflammatory rhetoric persisting in Bangui escalated tensions in early May, with continued clashes taking place between security forces and criminal groups. These resulted in casualties among civilians and peacekeepers. Meanwhile, the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation continued. Between February and April, the panel of facilitators of the Initiative completed its second round of consultations with the armed groups.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin

19. Boko Haram remained a threat in the Lake Chad Basin, with suicide bombings, kidnappings, arson attacks, raids and attacks on villages and educational institutions, looting, cattle raiding and ambushes on military positions, as well as the use of sexual violence against civilians. Mass abductions increased over the past months in the region. There were also frequent attacks against schools, with a devastating effect on access to education in the affected areas.

20. From December to April, Boko Haram was responsible for 98 security incidents in Cameroon and Chad. At least 81 civilians were killed in Cameroon, and one in

Chad. There were 10 suicide attacks and attempts in Cameroon during the same period, involving 15 suicide bombers, at least eight of whom were women and at least two children. On the night of 5 to 6 May, six people were reportedly killed, including four local Government officials and a soldier, in an attack by Boko Haram on a Chadian army checkpoint on the island of Gabalami in Lake Chad.

21. The growing use of young women and girls as suicide bombers created an atmosphere of suspicion towards them and made them targets of harassment, stigmatization by the affected communities and arbitrary arrests by security forces. This included the women and girls who managed to escape captivity. Local communities in Cameroon and Chad raised concerns about the reintegration of surrendered Boko Haram fighters.

22. In December, the ministers of defence and heads of security agencies of the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission met in N'Djamena to assess the security situation in the region and plan for future operations against Boko Haram. The Multinational Joint Task Force pursued its military operations against Boko Haram, while engaging in advocacy efforts along with Commission to promote a humanitarian response and address long-term development needs. The African Union and the Commission, with the support of various United Nations entities, held a conference to develop a coordinated regional approach to screen, prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate persons associated with Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, in line with Security Council resolution 2349 (2017), in N'Djamena from 10 to 13 April. This was a follow-up to the first Regional Stabilization Conference for the Lake Chad Region, held in N'Djaména from 2 to 4 November 2017, with the overall aim of developing a regional stabilization strategy for the Lake Chad region. The conference outlined six main pillars for the regional strategy, which is expected to be finalized in June: (a) disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; (b) the resettlement of internally displaced persons; (c) the enhancement of local capacities in resilience; (d) the socioeconomic revitalization of the region; (e) preventing violent extremism; and (f) education.

Lord's Resistance Army

23. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to pose security risks to civilians in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its attacks consisted of ambushes, lootings, abductions, sexual violence, poaching and killings. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, two civilians were killed. Incidents were concentrated in the Bangadi area of Dungu territory, the Banda area of Ango territory and Nambia locality in Niangara territory. Two LRA fighters surrendered with their weapons during the reporting period.

24. Between 1 November 2017 and 17 April, 32 LRA attacks allegedly took place in the Central African Republic, resulting in three deaths and 79 abductions. Most of the abductees were released within a short period. Most of the incidents took place in Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures. As part of its protection of civilians mandate, on 1 April, a joint patrol of MINUSCA and the Central African Armed Forces rescued 15 people who had been abducted by LRA during an attack against Koubou village, Haut-Mbomou prefecture.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

25. The fourth ordinary session of the conference of Heads of State and Government of the Gulf of Guinea Commission took place on 23 November in Abuja. The meeting approved a strategy to revitalize and improve the functioning of the Commission, as well as the accession of Ghana to the treaty establishing the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

26. At its fifth ordinary ministerial session, held in Libreville on 3 and 4 March, the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa requested the President of the Council of Ministers of ECCAS to convene a meeting of ministers in charge of maritime affairs and finance to discuss the financing of the maritime security and safety architecture.

Poaching and illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources

27. On 11 December, the European Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime signed an agreement in Libreville to address wildlife and forest crime, as well as the illicit trafficking of natural resources in Central Africa. The agreement aims at strengthening the national and regional capacities of law enforcement officers, prosecutors and the judiciary in ECCAS member States.

B. Humanitarian developments

28. As at 26 April, the situation in Burundi remained precarious, with 3.6 million people in need of assistance throughout the country and over 430,478 Burundian refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Based on a tripartite agreement between Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR, almost 21,500 Burundian refugees were voluntarily repatriated from the United Republic of Tanzania between September 2017 and 5 April.

29. Political unrest and violence in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon resulted in the forced displacement of nearly 21,291 Cameroonians to Nigeria between October 2017 and the end of April. The rise in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Cameroon resulted in a surge in humanitarian needs for both the displaced populations and vulnerable host communities. Cameroon hosted 255,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the eastern regions as of April. Due to population displacement, food insecurity and epidemics, 3.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance, for which \$304.5 million was requested in 2018.

30. In the Central African Republic, the overall number of internally displaced persons increased by 70 per cent in the past year, reaching over 680,000. The number of refugees also increased by 30 per cent in the same period, reaching almost 570,000. Worsening security had a negative impact on humanitarian access. Threats and acts of violence against non-governmental organizations led humanitarian partners to review their presence in some areas. Moreover, engagement with parties to the conflict was becoming increasingly difficult due to the increased fragmentation of armed groups. Humanitarian operations were hindered by lack of funding.

31. As at 30 April, Chad hosted 449,490 refugees, mainly from the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the Sudan. Approximately 30,000 new refugees fled to southern Chad following a surge in violence in north-west Central African Republic at the end of December. Chad was also striving to address growing food insecurity, malnutrition and health emergencies that had left 4.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including around 4 million who were food insecure. The required humanitarian response for 2018 was estimated at \$544 million.

32. The improving security situation in the Pool region of the Republic of the Congo will facilitate the return of internally displaced persons and the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the country. With almost 160,000 people affected, significant humanitarian challenges remained. The country hosted 31,688 refugees from the Central African Republic and 15,654 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo as at 30 April.

33. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was facing its worst cholera outbreak in 15 years. Moreover, on 8 May, the Government declared an outbreak of Ebola virus disease in Equateur Province — the ninth outbreak in the country since the disease was first discovered in 1976 — with 51 cases reported as at 22 May. For 2018, aid organizations requested \$1.68 billion to assist some 10.5 million people, more than twice the \$812.6 million requested in 2017. The needs for almost 807,000 Congolese refugees in the top eight recipient countries amounted to \$504 million, while a separate Ebola response plan amounts to \$57 million for a three-month period.

34. Due to funding shortfalls, the World Food Programme reduced its food and cash assistance to more than 140,000 refugees in Rwanda. This was seen by humanitarian actors and the Government of Rwanda as a catalyst for refugees from Kiziba camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to start protests and a sit-in in February, leading to the death of 11 refugees when security forces intervened to end the protests. UNHCR deplored the disproportionate use of force by the police and called on the Rwandan authorities to refrain from further use of force and to investigate the circumstances of the incidents.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin

35. The Boko Haram conflict continued to fuel a humanitarian crisis, with 10.7 million people in need of life-saving assistance in the affected regions of Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. As at 30 April, some 211,516 Nigerian refugees were registered in the Lake Chad Basin, including 93,114 in Cameroon and 9,932 in Chad. Approximately 2.1 million people were internally displaced. Across the affected region, \$1.6 billion was required in 2018 for humanitarian assistance, including \$189.1 million for Cameroon and \$179.4 million for Chad. Across the Lake Chad Basin, the number of food insecure people was expected to rise to 5.7 million during the lean season starting in June.

36. By end of April, Cameroon hosted some 93,100 Nigerian refugees in the Far North region, where the protection of civilians and gender-based violence remained of great concern. While voluntary returns to Nigeria from Cameroon took place during the reporting period, incidents of forced returns continued to be reported in the second half of 2017 and the first quarter of 2018, although in fewer numbers than earlier in 2017. In Chad, Boko Haram activities impeded trade with Nigeria and Cameroon, affecting in particular the Chadian herders who would previously cross the border with Nigeria to sell their livestock.

C. Human rights trends

37. Reports of alleged serious human rights violations and abuses, notably killings, forced disappearances, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, detentions and restrictions on the freedoms of association, expression and movement continued in Burundi. The ongoing political impasse, increased unemployment and rising prices of basic commodities and services had a devastating impact on the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. The Imbonerakure continued to act as law enforcement agents. The Government of Burundi and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) pursued their discussion to resume cooperation suspended since October 2016.

38. In Cameroon, there were continued reports of alleged human rights violations in the English-speaking regions and the areas affected by Boko Haram, including the killing of members of the defence and security forces, local authorities and civilians, abductions, excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests by security forces, and restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, and the right to free trial. The

forced return of 47 Cameroonians from Nigeria in late January, the majority of whom had lodged asylum claims in Nigeria, and the unknown status of their conditions and whereabouts, have raised concern about a possible breach of international human rights and refugee instruments ratified by Cameroon and Nigeria.

39. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA documented verified incidents of violations or abuses of human rights, including targeted attacks against civilians along religious and ethnic lines.

40. In Chad, restrictions were placed on citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, including a prohibition on demonstrations for security reasons. On 6 February, 50 people were arrested during a public demonstration organized by the opposition to protest austerity measures. Following their trial, 16 were released on procedural grounds and 34 sentenced to imprisonment for four months by the high court of N'Djamena. On 6 February, the Government suspended the activities of 10 political parties accused of "incitement to violence" and disruption of public order for two months. The suspension was lifted on 17 February for five of the parties that had lodged an appeal.

41. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, civilians in conflict-affected areas continued to be at risk of serious human rights violations, including killings and sexual violence. Interethnic and intercommunity violence resurfaced in some areas, notably in Ituri province. The conflicts created conditions conducive to sexual violence. There was also violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Kinshasa and other cities.

42. In the Republic of the Congo, some opposition and human rights organizations expressed concern about the non-inclusion of reparations provisions in the December 2017 ceasefire agreement for the victims of the crisis in the Pool region. The Government accepted an offer by OHCHR to assist in the establishment of a national commission of inquiry into the allegations of human rights violations committed in the country since 2015, including those related to the Pool crisis and incidents surrounding the referendum on the Constitution in 2015. On 11 May, former presidential candidate Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

43. In Equatorial Guinea, a supporter of the opposition Ciudadanos por la Innovación de Guinea Ecuatorial party died in custody on 14 January as a result of "torture and ill treatment", according to the party. The Government refuted the accusation. On 26 February, as part of its order on dissolving the party (see para. 12 above), the district court of Mongomo sentenced 21 of its members to more than 30 years in prison and heavy individual fines. This, too, was upheld by the Supreme Court. Those sentenced were part of a group of 147 arrested during separate security incidents following the legislative elections of November 2017. They were accused of sedition, public disorder, abuse of authority, serious injury and conspiracy against the State. The other arrested members were released.

44. In Gabon, opposition parties and civil society organizations denounced illegal arrests and prolonged detention, torture, ill-treatment and disappearances of opposition members and frequent travel bans imposed on opposition leaders. The European Union requested an international investigation into the post-electoral violence in 2016 during its intensified dialogue with the Government in October 2017, resulting in the halting of dialogue to date.

45. In Rwanda, in early 2018 the Parliament adopted a new penal code removing solitary confinement as a punishment for crimes and lessening certain provisions related to defamation. However, the new code still contained provisions that had reportedly been used to oppress and silence political opponents.

D. Socioeconomic trends

46. The socioeconomic context was marked by social tension and strike actions, including against austerity measures adopted by governments in several countries to tackle the consequences of falling oil prices. Forecasts by the Bank of Central African States indicated a slight increase in the prices of the main export products in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) space, including oil, compared with 2017. In addition, Chad and the Republic of the Congo were expected to increase their oil production. Chad was also forecasted to accelerate activities in non-oil sectors, along with Cameroon and Gabon. Economic growth in CEMAC was expected to rise to 1.7 per cent in 2018, compared to a decrease of 0.2 in 2017. The CEMAC budget for 2018 would enable the institution to implement key projects in transportation infrastructure and complete its institutional reforms programme. To date, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and Gabon had signed new economic agreements with the International Monetary Fund.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and prevention

Angola

47. From 7 to 9 February, my Special Representative travelled to Luanda, and met President Lourenço and the Minister of External Relations. They discussed the reform of ECCAS and the country's role in conflict prevention in the subregion.

Cameroon

48. My Special Representative travelled to Cameroon from 24 February to 4 March to assess the situation in the country. He reiterated the call for genuine dialogue to find lasting solutions to the crisis in the north-west and south-west regions and expressed the readiness of the United Nations to support national decentralization efforts within the framework of the Constitution. Several UNOCA working-level visits were undertaken in November 2017 to provide support to the Resident Coordinator's office. The Department of Political Affairs, United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations country team continued to work closely with the Cameroonian electoral management body to develop targeted activities, in line with the recommendations of the electoral needs assessment mission of July 2017.

49. The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon visited the English-speaking regions on 7 and 8 February to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground, jointly with UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Government. The mission focused on information-gathering on potential humanitarian needs and population movements and identifying options for delivering humanitarian assistance. On 22 February, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator and the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations visited Cameroon.

Central African Republic

50. From 15 to 18 March, my Special Representative and the Secretary-General of ECCAS undertook a joint visit to the Central African Republic to reiterate United Nations and ECCAS support to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation.

They met with President Touadera and welcomed the decision by the Government to reactivate the joint commissions between the Central African Republic and Cameroon, as well as Chad and the Sudan to address regional security concerns. In a joint communiqué issued on 17 March, the two officials reiterated their determination to continue to support the panel of facilitators of the African Initiative and to contribute to the development of the country, in close coordination with my Special Representative for the Central African Republic. From 10 to 13 April, my Special Representative returned to Bangui to participate in the meeting of the International Support Group. He also visited the country from 13 to 16 May to engage with national authorities, MINUSCA and other stakeholders on the deteriorating situation. UNOCA dispatched a working-level team from 7 to 14 February, in the context of the implementation of the African Initiative.

Chad

51. My Special Representative travelled to Chad from 14 to 18 January, 11 to 14 March and 17 to 19 April for consultations with the Government and other national stakeholders, to promote an inclusive political dialogue. During his meeting with President Deby Itno on 18 April, he called for the swift establishment of the standing framework for political dialogue, as recommended by the national forum on institutional reforms.

52. From 9 to 13 April, UNOCA and the Peacebuilding Support Office participated in a programming support mission to Chad to identify priority opportunities for consideration by the Peacebuilding Fund. UNOCA also took part in a United Nations electoral needs assessment mission to Chad, led by the Department of Political Affairs, from 12 to 23 February.

Equatorial Guinea

53. My Special Representative visited Equatorial Guinea from 8 to 10 January to meet with President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo after the foiled coup attempt of 28 December. He condemned any attempted change of Government by unconstitutional means and dispatched a working-level team to Malabo, from 22 to 26 January, to assess the political and human rights situation.

Gabon

54. My Special Representative continued to engage with political actors to encourage their participation in the upcoming legislative elections and their contribution to democratic governance. He also encouraged the Government to ensure adequate communication with all political actors in preparing for the elections.

Republic of the Congo

55. My Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville from 10 to 14 January, following the signing of the December 2017 ceasefire agreement. He met with President Denis Sassou Nguesso and other stakeholders to encourage continued efforts towards achieving lasting peace in the Pool region. He further emphasized that a comprehensive peace agreement, including a political framework, was crucial to ensure an environment conducive to a successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. UNOCA dispatched a working-level team to Brazzaville and Kinkala, from 10 to 17 February, to consult all stakeholders in joint efforts with the United Nations country team to develop a gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and dialogue project proposal for possible funding by the Peacebuilding Fund. At the request of the Government, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations led a technical assessment mission to Brazzaville from

22 January to 4 February to support the national authorities and the United Nations country team in developing a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration strategy. The Department of Political Affairs deployed a member of its standby team of senior mediation experts to provide further technical support from 3 to 16 March.

Sao Tome and Principe

56. From 21 to 25 January, my Special Representative travelled to Sao Tome and Principe to defuse tensions stemming from the appointment of the members of the newly established Constitutional Court and facilitate dialogue between the Government and opposition parties. He met with President Carvalho, Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada and other senior Government officials, political parties, civil society representatives and international partners.

57. From 13 to 16 March, UNOCA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) co-organized, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Sao Tome and Principe, a training workshop for media professionals in Sao Tome.

B. Support to United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

58. In its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA facilitated the organization of the forty-fifth ministerial meeting in Kigali, from 4 to 8 December. The Committee dedicated a closed-door meeting to the situation in the Central African Republic and trans-border security challenges and affirmed its full support for the reform of Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa. A communiqué prepared by a youth forum in Libreville from 30 November to 2 December, called upon States and regional organizations to take into account the priorities of the youth and ensure their participation in security and development initiatives. The forty-sixth meeting of the Committee was scheduled in Brazzaville from 29 May to 1 June.

59. From 17 to 19 April, UNOCA organized a visit by representatives of the Bureau of the Committee to Brazzaville and the Pool region in the Republic of the Congo to assess recent security developments and discuss the situation with relevant authorities. The findings of the mission would be presented at the forty-sixth ministerial meeting of the Committee.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

60. My Special Representative held regular meetings with the Secretary-General of ECCAS to discuss the political and security situation in the subregion and coordinate their respective approaches in addressing a number of issues. They agreed to conduct joint visits to ECCAS member States to support peace and security efforts. The joint visit to the Central African Republic mentioned in paragraph 50 above was the first in a series of visits planned for 2018. On 12 May, they held a consultative and planning meeting in Libreville, on the sidelines of a joint working-level retreat between the two institutions, and adopted a joint biennial programme for 2018–2019.

61. My Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel attended the consultation meeting between ECCAS and ECOWAS, mentioned in para. 5 above. UNOCA also participated in the opening and closing ceremonies of the

Council of Ministers of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa mentioned in paragraph 4 above.

62. From 16 to 20 April, UNOCA and ECCAS conducted a joint train-the-trainer session on terrorism, cybercrime, money laundering, drugs and narcotics for 31 Gabonese police officers in Libreville.

63. On 23 and 24 May, gender experts from Central Africa will validate the regional action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) at a two-day workshop co-organized by UNOCA and ECCAS in Brazzaville. The plan identifies priority actions on women, peace and security in the subregion.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad Basin

64. My Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel, supported by the respective United Nations country teams, continued to support advocacy efforts for the development of a joint regional strategy to address the root causes of the Lake Chad Basin crisis through regular contacts with regional leaders. In that regard, UNOCA and UNOWAS participated in the first Regional Stabilization Conference for the Lake Chad Region and the follow-up regional conference in N'Djamena, mentioned in paragraph 22 above.

65. From 14 to 16 February, a UNOCA working-level team participated in a regional seminar in Maroua, in the Far North region of Cameroon, on the reintegration of surrendered Boko Haram fighters. In line with its action plan against Boko Haram, UNOCA deployed a working-level team to N'Djamena on 15 and 16 March to set up a cooperation framework with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force, and to establish a platform to exchange views with national and subregional stakeholders and conduct joint analysis on Boko Haram. The team also reached out to the Chadian centre for strategic studies and prospective analysis and the Centre for Studies for the Development and Prevention of Violent Extremism. UNOCA contacted other regional research institutions working on radicalization and violent extremism across the Boko Haram affected countries, to share their research findings and develop sustainable solutions.

Regional integration

66. At its second meeting, held in Libreville on 5 and 6 February, the steering committee in charge of the ECCAS institutional reform selected the research team to work on the technical aspects of the reform, following a public tender. During his policy address to the CEMAC Parliament in Malabo on 2 March, the President of the CEMAC Commission emphasized the importance of the ECCAS/CEMAC rationalization process. He also underscored that one of his priorities would be to implement key measures in support of the free movement of persons and goods policy and to secure the external borders of CEMAC. On 19 February, Chadian President Deby Itno, in his capacity as CEMAC Chairperson, announced the temporary relocation of CEMAC headquarters from Bangui to Malabo.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

67. From 10 to 17 February, UNOCA deployed a working-level team to Yaoundé to assist the Interregional Coordination Centre for Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea to finalize its resource mobilization strategy documents. My Special Representative met with the Executive Director of the Centre on 2 March to discuss the operationalization of the Centre and resource mobilization challenges.

68. On 5 April, my Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel participated in the annual meeting of the Heads of ECCAS, ECOWAS and

the Gulf of Guinea Commission in Yaoundé. Participants discussed the implementation of the regional strategy on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

69. In keeping with the recommendation made by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, the Council of Ministers of Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa adopted the strategy to prevent and fight terrorism in Central Africa, as mentioned in paragraph 4 above. The strategy awaits endorsement by the Summit of ECCAS Heads of State and Government.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army¹

70. From 17 to 26 February, UNOCA and the African Union conducted a joint visit to Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to assess the LRA threat and the effectiveness of counter-LRA operations and protection of civilians. The mission assessed that livelihood activities away from town centres had stopped and critical humanitarian challenges remained, underscoring a need to strengthen the military response from the African Union Regional Task Force and mobilize funds to support rehabilitation and stabilization initiatives in the LRA-affected zones. Within the framework of Operation Red Kite, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to carry out joint operations in affected areas with limited resources.

71. On 28 and 29 March, in cooperation with African Union, UNOCA organized the second workshop for sector commanders of the African Union Regional Task Force in Addis Ababa to promote coordination between the sector commanders of the Central African Armed Forces in Obo, Central African Republic, and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Dungu. Participants agreed on common practices in repatriating LRA defectors to their countries of origin in line with the standard operating procedures signed by the LRA-affected countries.

72. MONUSCO continued to encourage LRA elements to surrender and played a key role in the repatriation of LRA defectors, with the support of international partners. Fourteen people surrendered, including two LRA fighters awaiting their repatriation to Uganda, at FARDC headquarters. Nine escapees were repatriated and three other victims were awaiting repatriation from Dungu.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

73. My Special Representative participated in the 32nd high-level meeting of Heads of United Nations missions in West Africa, held in Bamako on 5 March.

74. On 29 March, my Special Representative met with the Director-General of UNESCO in Libreville to discuss the effective implementation of the three-year regional programme, jointly developed by UNOCA, UNESCO and ECCAS, with the support of the International Organization of La Francophonie, on strengthening the

¹ See S/2012/481.

capacity of youth in managing an early warning system to promote peace and security in Central Africa.

75. On 10 and 11 April, UNOCA and UNOWAS organized an experience-sharing meeting in Libreville on conflict analysis and pastoralism. Among other things, participants from UN and ECCAS agreed on carrying out joint UNOCA-ECCAS conflict analyses in 2018 and on UN system support to ECCAS to implement its decision on convening a regional conference towards the adoption of subregional regulation on pastoralism in Central Africa, as indicated in paragraph 4 above.

76. On 26 and 27 April, UNOCA hosted the sixth annual meeting of the heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, comprising special envoys and representatives of the Secretary-General, resident coordinators and regional directors of United Nations entities. The meeting explored ways of improving coordination and creating synergies to achieve peace, stability and prosperity in the subregion by focusing on political dialogue and agreements in Central Africa.

IV. Mandate renewal of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

77. Based on the outcome of the strategic review of UNOCA, led by the Department of Political Affairs in 2015, the mandate of the Office was re-focused (see S/2015/554 and S/2015/555). UNOCA made noticeable contributions to conflict prevention and management through the good offices of my Special Representative. It was instrumental in preventing or mitigating election-related crises and promoting inclusive political dialogue and reform processes in Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo and Sao Tome and Principe. UNOCA remained engaged on the crisis in the Central African Republic and promoted bilateral cooperation with the country's neighbours, while encouraging coherence among international and regional actors. My Special Representative continued to mobilize regional support for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the country.

78. UNOCA bolstered cooperation with regional and subregional organizations on peace and security, in particular the African Union, ECCAS, CEMAC and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. The cooperation framework between UNOCA and the ECCAS secretariat, signed in June 2016, was central to improving joint or coordinated approaches between both entities in preventive diplomacy, early warning, mediation, gender mainstreaming and capacity-building, among others. The Office remained engaged with ECCAS and CEMAC in support of regional integration and institutional reforms to rationalize both institutions. Through enhanced collaboration, UNOCA and UNOWAS provided strategic support for regional and subregional initiatives to promote maritime security and address the Lake Chad Basin crisis. UNOCA continued to support regional efforts to counter LRA. It collaborated with ECCAS and the African Union Commission to enhance early warning in Central Africa. UNOCA further ensured coherence and coordination in the activities of United Nations entities in Central Africa on peace and security. UNOCA continued to serve as the Secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

79. Going forward, UNOCA will assist the countries of the subregion in consolidating peace and resolving lingering tensions from the various elections that took place in the period from 2015 to 2018. One of the main priorities of UNOCA for the upcoming mandate period will be to work with ECCAS and its member States towards laying the groundwork for the structural prevention of election-related violence. UNOCA will continue to conduct joint assessments and visits with ECCAS and to enhance the capacities of the ECCAS secretariat in conflict prevention, early

warning, women and peace and security, mediation and other areas. UNOCA will also work closely with UNOWAS on addressing transregional issues such as Boko Haram, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and transhumance.

V. Observations and recommendations

80. Recent developments in Central Africa highlight the volatile and fast-evolving nature of the political, security and social situation in the subregion. Tensions linked to contested electoral processes, as well as social and economic difficulties continued. I welcome efforts by concerned States in the region to undertake reforms to address mounting challenges and to promote democratic governance. Such reform processes should be inclusive and allow for differences to be resolved peacefully. I encourage Member States to uphold their commitments under international human rights instruments by, inter alia, strengthening human rights institutions at the national and regional levels and cooperating actively with relevant international mechanisms.

81. I am encouraged by the adoption by ECCAS of a strategy to prevent and fight terrorism in Central Africa. Practical arrangements and resource mobilization will be essential in implementing the strategy. I also welcome the decision to undertake a comprehensive reform of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, especially to enhance regional solidarity and improve governance. To strengthen the capacities of the subregion for conflict prevention and management, the reform of the Council should be aligned with the ongoing rationalization of CEMAC and ECCAS, which I commend for their sustained commitment to advance their respective reform processes. I also welcome the announcement that ECCAS and ECOWAS will hold a joint summit in July 2018. The United Nations system stands ready to support those efforts.

82. I am heartened by regional efforts, supported by international partners, in the fight against Boko Haram and commend the countries of the Lake Chad Basin for their active engagement in this regard. At the same time, I am appalled by the continuing threat of Boko Haram and other armed groups, serious human rights violations and the dire humanitarian situation in the affected countries. It is vital for the Multinational Joint Task Force to receive further support. The United Nations remains committed to helping mobilize additional international support for this endeavour in close cooperation with the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. I also urge regional, international and bilateral partners to provide support for the implementation of the stabilization, recovery and resilience strategy for the Lake Chad Basin, in line with Security Council resolution 2349 (2017). I exhort Member States to contribute to the relevant humanitarian appeals and deliver on their pledges. My Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel will continue their efforts, in close cooperation with ECCAS, ECOWAS, the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, to ensure that all relevant strategies are mutually reinforcing and effectively address the root causes of the crisis while integrating human rights and gender dimensions.

83. I take note of the planned elections in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe in 2018. I urge the Governments concerned to work towards the conduct of timely, inclusive, credible and peaceful electoral processes and to ensure an increased participation by and representation of women.

84. I am concerned by the growing number of attacks in the English-speaking regions in Cameroon, resulting in a deterioration of the security situation and the disruption of public services, particularly in the education sector. I hope that the new Cabinet, announced on 2 March, will take immediate and concrete steps towards

devising long-term solutions to address the grievances, including by establishing an open and inclusive dialogue and advancing on the decentralization agenda to devise long-term solutions to address grievances and prevent further violence.

85. I remain concerned by continued insecurity across the Central African Republic, including violence against civilians and attacks against United Nations peacekeepers and aid workers. At the same time, I am encouraged by progress achieved by the Government in the restoration of State authority and the continued resolve of the international community to support the authorities in these efforts. The first meeting of the International Support Group reflected this continued international commitment. As the work of the panel of facilitators of the African Initiative proceeds, we must continue to remind the Government and all stakeholders that a political resolution of the crisis is the only avenue for sustainable peace. My Special Representatives for the Central African Republic and for Central Africa will continue to consult with neighbouring States and regional and subregional organizations to promote increased and coherent engagement with the Central African Republic, with a specific focus on the operationalization of bilateral joint commissions.

86. I am troubled by the persistent activities of LRA, which target civilians and undermine security in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, further impeding development in the affected areas. I call upon the African Union and troop-contributing countries to make the necessary arrangements for the reconfiguration of the African Union Regional Task Force. Overall efforts should remain focused on addressing the root causes of LRA.

87. I am encouraged by the active engagement of member States of ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to advance the implementation of the regional strategy on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea. UNOCA and UNOWAS will continue to work with ECCAS and ECOWAS to provide support for the full operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea.

88. I remain concerned by the growing threat of mercenary activities linked with transnational organized crime and the link between transhumance and armed conflict. I commend ECCAS for committing to developing a subregional strategy to fight mercenary activities and transnational organized crime and to holding a regional conference towards the adoption of subregional regulation on pastoralism. The United Nations stands ready to support these efforts in cooperation with other partners.

89. Over the past three years, 10 of the 11 countries in Central Africa conducted or have been preparing for elections. Most of the electoral processes were marred with tension before, during or after the polls. The timely intervention and persistent good offices of my Special Representative have, on most occasions, helped to prevent tensions from escalating out of control. UNOCA has therefore continued to serve as an important and effective tool for preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention in Central Africa. The strategic review conducted in 2015 recognized the role of UNOCA in this regard. One key lesson learned from those electoral processes was that preventing election-related violence also required addressing the structural causes of such violence by working ahead of electoral cycles to build the trust of all stakeholders in the process, establish a consensual legal and institutional framework, and put in place adequate mechanisms for the resolution of legal and political disputes. A key priority for UNOCA for the next mandate will be to work with ECCAS and its member States towards laying the groundwork for the structural prevention of election-related violence. Of note, elections at various levels are planned in all 11 countries in Central Africa over the next three years.

90. Furthermore, the complex nature of ongoing conflicts in the subregion, the emergence of new threats to peace and security and outstanding challenges require a

sustained and more coordinated and coherent support from the United Nations and the international community. As ECCAS and CEMAC pursue their efforts to implement institutional reforms, mobilizing the necessary political, technical and financial support should remain a major priority. The convening of regular tripartite meetings between UNOCA, ECCAS and CEMAC will be a useful tool in this process. The growing transregional threats also necessitate strengthened cooperation between ECCAS and ECOWAS, and between UNOCA and UNOWAS.

91. In view of the above, I recommend that the mandate of UNOCA be extended for another three years, from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2021.

92. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the region, ECCAS, CEMAC, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force, the African Union Regional Task Force and their troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support to UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support to and cooperation with UNOCA.

93. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, François Louncény Fall, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.